Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

 We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF SENTENCES AND CLAUSES

WILLIAM GARDNER HALE
University of Chicago

If you go into any grammar school and visit English classes of the upper grades, you will hear a certain classification of sentences employed—namely, into *declarative, interrogative, imperative,* and *exclamatory*—and insisted upon as of fundamental importance. It is one of the points in which students are most carefully drilled.

This classification is found, in substance, in all the elementary English grammars in our schools; in the large English grammars of Sweet, Earle, Maetzner, and others; in all our American Latin grammars but one; in various English and German grammars of Latin; in various Greek grammars; in Maetzner's French grammar, Whitney's German grammar, in the recent *Report of the English Committee on Grammatical Terminology,* etc., etc. With a single exception, namely the Hale-Buck *Latin Grammar,* all books that give any scheme give this.

The classification is over two thousand years old. It goes back to Aristotle,[1] whose scheme—a somewhat fuller one, but essentially the same—was: declarative, vocative, optative, interrogative, imperative.

In spite of its venerable history,[2] I believe, and have long taught, that the classification is unsound, and must be abandoned.

Let us get clearly in mind what each class-name is intended to mean.

The word "interrogative" requires no explanation, and the same is true of the word "exclamatory." The word "declarative," as

---

[1] The scheme of Aristotle is a modification of the scheme of the Sophist Protagoras. Various others were proposed in antiquity, but this one survived.

[2] Whoever wishes to hold to it *because* it was Aristotle's must hold also to Aristotle's "vocative sentences" (which only means vocative words) as one of the classes, must add the class "optative," and must give up the class "exclamatory."

interpreted by the examples given in the various books (thus, "the horse runs"), means "making a statement of fact." Moreover, a number of writers distinctly say this. Thus one of them uses the formula, "declarative sentences, those that make a statement of fact," and another "A declarative sentence is a sentence which declares or asserts something as a fact," and another, "imputing truth." We will accordingly so interpret.

The word "imperative" is meant to cover something more than the imperative mood proper. As explained in one or another grammar, it serves as a convenient name to include commands, wishes, requests, etc. Thus one author says, "imperative sentences, those that express a command or a wish;" and another states that imperative sentences "express either a command or a request."

We may then draw up the table as follows:

1. Declarative (making a statement of fact).
2. Interrogative (asking a question).
3. Imperative (expressing a command, a wish, a request, and the like).
4. Exclamatory.

The class "exclamatory" is sometimes omitted, sometimes put under "imperative"—the latter a purely fanciful procedure, like the putting of vocatives under the same head, on the ground that they make a demand for attention.

In testing this traditional scheme, it will be convenient to have a number of examples at hand to ring our changes upon. Let us select the following:

1. Declarative: "He is writing," or *scribit*.
2. Interrogative: { "Is he writing? or *scribit?*[1]
   { "Shall he write?" or *scribat?*[1]
3. Imperative: "*Let* him write," "he *shall* write," or *scribat*.
4. Exclamatory: "How well he writes!" or *quam bene scribit!*

Now, a sound scheme for the classification of sentences must make an affirmative answer possible for four questions which I am going to put. I will state these questions one at a time, and we will test our scheme for it, and register the answer.

[1] It will be convenient to use the simple form without the interrogative particle *-ne*. Both forms are found in free use.

1. Is the scheme symmetrical?

The two sentences, "Is he writing?" and "Shall he write?" though in part unlike, are necessarily put together, in the scheme, under the head of *interrogative*. Why are they so put together? Because they both ask a question, and for no other reason. No other element enters into consideration. Then the corresponding non-interrogative pair, *scribit*, "he writes," and *scribat*, "he shall write" (or "let him write"), should likewise be found keeping company. The two verbs bear precisely the same relation to each other in the anti-interrogative form as they bore before in the interrogative form. But *do* they fall together in the anti-interrogative form? No. They part company, one going under the head of the declarative sentence, the other of the imperative. Then the answer to our question, "Is the scheme symmetrical?" is "no."

2. Does the scheme cover all sentences?

On p. 180 of one of our *Lessons in English* I find, under the examples selected for another purpose, Whittier's lines: "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: 'It might have been.'"

Does "might have been" state a fact? No. It states a past *possibility*, which has *not* become a fact, and never will become one. Neither is it interrogative, imperative, or exclamatory. The scheme has accordingly no place for it. Again, in the same book I find Shakespeare's sentence, "Then 'twere well it were done quickly." "It were well" ("'twere well") does not express a fact; it expresses a *certainty of the mind with regard to an imagined case*. But for such sentences, likewise, the scheme has no place. It accordingly does *not* cover all sentences, and we must register our answer as "no."

3. Are the classes mutually exclusive?

"Let him write" or "he shall write," *scribat*, is imperative. "Shall he write?" *scribat?* is clearly interrogative. But it is also still clearly imperative. It does not cease to be imperative in becoming interrogative, any more than *scribit*, "he is writing," ceases to be indicative in becoming *scribit?* interrogative. Under which one of our four heads, then, shall we class *scribat?* "shall he write?" It will go under *two* heads, imperative and interrogative.

Then the classes are *not* mutually exclusive, and there is some serious defect in the scheme. Again, then, we must register our answer as "no."

4. Are the classes homogeneous?

The class "imperative" is of what kind? It is a *mood*-class. Are the classes interrogative and exclamatory mood-classes? No. Nobody ever put "interrogative" and "exclamatory" among the moods in writing a grammar, or ever will. These words express ideas wholly unrelated to mood, and accordingly wholly indifferent to mood. "Is he going?" "shall he go?" "would he go?" and the like, are all interrogative without regard to their mood. Then the classes "interrogative" sentences and "exclamatory" sentences are *not* of the same nature with the class "imperative" and cannot be set over against it. The scheme is drawn up on the basis of distinctions of *two kinds of ideas, having absolutely no relation to each other*—as unlike each other, to make a comparison, as sex and stature are. *And neither kind of idea is carried out.* So far as we have now progressed, the traditional scheme is as if we were to divide all mankind, not into male *and* female, nor into tall people *and* short, but into (1) *males* and (2) *tall people*. Once more, then, our answer is "no."

But the classes, on closer examination, turn out to be even more strikingly unhomogeneous than this. We have seen that one of them, the class "imperative," expresses mood, while the classes "interrogative" and "exclamatory" express something quite different from mood. But the remaining class, the "declarative" sentence, instead of doing one or the other of these things, does both. As we have already seen, our grammars say, or imply, that the declarative sentence states a fact. Then "declarative" means both *declarative* (which belongs to the same order of ideas as "interrogative") and *indicative* (which belongs to the same order of ideas as "imperative"). It really means *declarative indicative*. Our traditional scheme, accordingly, contains *three* different kinds of classes—one dealing with one kind of idea, one dealing with another kind, and one dealing with a mixture of the two. To complete our comparison, the scheme, as far as we have gone, is as if we were to divide all human beings into:

  1. Tall males (sex and stature).
  2. Male (sex).
  3. Tall (stature).

Precisely herein lies the radical fault of the scheme. Precisely this is the cause of its failure to answer our four questions successfully. The divisions of a classification that embraces three different kinds of categories are not homogeneous, *cannot* be symmetrical, and *cannot* be mutually exclusive; nor are they likely to cover all sentences, since a complete list would have to carry out each of two different kinds of distinctions, and all possible mixtures of the two.[1]

And now to solve the problem. It is obvious that we must adopt one kind of ideas *or* the other for the basis of our classification, and carry that idea out. To use our illustration again, we must either complete the categories of sex (male, female), or complete the categories of stature (tall, short, with as many gradations as may be desired, but all dealing with the same matter of stature).

To make our choice in the case before us, we must get a clear notion as to what the two kinds of ideas are. As for the mood-kind, we already recognize its essential nature. We must then fix our attention on the other kind, of which "interrogative" and "exclamatory" form classes.

Let us postpone for the moment the class *exclamatory*, and look at the class *interrogative*.

What is the opposite of interrogative? Or, to put the matter in language that any child can understand, what is the opposite of *asking?* It is *telling*.

Obviously these are the two great functions of sentences. I tell somebody else what I think or want, or I ask somebody else what he thinks or wants. Let us illustrate this.

A sentence may *tell* something. This something may be a fact, as in "he is writing," *scribit;* a demand (the *will* of the speaker), as in "let him write," *scribat;* a wish, as in "may he write," *utinam scribat;* a possibility, as in "he may write," *forsitan scribat;* a certainty in a purely imagined case, as in "he would write" or "he

---

[1] Aristotle reached his classification primarily from the point of view of a logician. His aim was to lay down a method by which truth might be reached. His starting-point had accordingly to be that form of sentence from which inferences could be drawn, namely, a statement of fact (the "declarative sentence," in the sense in which this phrase has thus far been used). To this, however, Aristotle added other classes, which were truly grammatical.

would have written," *scribat, scripsisset*. Each of these sentences *tells* the mood-idea (the attitude of mind) of the speaker or writer.

Or, again, the sentence may *ask* something. Thus "is he writing?" *scribit?*; "shall he write?" *scribat?*; "would he write?" "would he have written?" *scribat? scripsisset?* Each of these sentences *inquires about* the mood-idea (the attitude of mind) of the person addressed.

Now we have only to think a moment in order to realize that, whether we tell or ask, every sentence *must* contain a mood-idea, as the above examples do. You cannot make a sentence without a predication, and you cannot use a predicative verb moodlessly. But this is only a part of the whole story. It is equally obvious that you cannot present a given mood-idea (say in the matter of John's presence), without at the same time doing one of two things, conveying it as yours, *or* asking whether it is that of your interlocutor ("John is present," *or* "is John present?").

What is it that does these two different things? The *verb*, by itself, or with the help of modifiers specially attached to it, conveys the mood-idea. *The sentence as a whole* (1) shows the speaker's mood-idea, or (2) asks for that of the person he is talking to. That which a thing does, we call its *function*. The function of the sentence as such is, then, to present the speaker's mood-idea, or to ask for that of his interlocutor. The relation here is one of the *"first person"* to the *"second."*

But you cannot even *ask* another's mood-idea except by using a verb, and this in itself must inevitably carry a mood-idea. What you really do, then, in asking of another what his mood-idea is, is to *express* a mood-idea and ask if he holds it. The function of a sentence (if we for the moment postpone exclamations) is accordingly to say one of the two following things:

1. My mood-idea is *this*.
2. Is your mood-idea *this?*[1]

[1] Such a question is a "yes-or-no question." There is a second kind, in which the mood-idea of the interlocutor is taken for granted, and the question is one of *detail* (as I have called it in the Hale-Buck *Latin Grammar*), as in "whom shall we send?" But it is not worth while to complicate the exposition by adding this whenever the question is spoken of.

A complete statement would also add, that, instead of speaking to another person, one may frame thought of either kind for oneself alone. But this likewise needs but a single mention.

Now for the technical names to be used for these two functions. The best name for the second, in English, is the already familiar name "interrogative." For the first, there is no good name. "Enunciative" would be quite perfect, if it didn't sound too learned. "Expositive" ("setting forth") would be perfect, but for the fact that we want, if possible, a corresponding noun and verb; and the noun "exposition" and verb "expose" would not do. "Uttering," "disclosing," "revealing," "conveying," have their individual defects; though "conveying" and "convey," like "expositive," are good in helping to explain the idea. "Declarative," which properly means simply "making clear," would have been a perfect word, if it had not been hurt by being wedded to a mood-idea, that of the indicative. But the best practical thing to do seems to be to accept it, divorcing it of all reference to mood— explaining, for example, that one can declare one's *will* or one's *wish* as well as one's perception of fact, or possibility, or certainty in an imagined case, etc. The scheme will then be:

1. *Declarative* (corresponding noun, *Declaration*).
2. *Interrogative* (corresponding noun, *Question*).

We can now decide whether we want to classify by mood-ideas or by functions of sentences. We want to do both. But we already have a classification of mood-ideas in every grammar, under its proper head of "Moods." What we want for the classification of *sentences* is a classification by functions. We have reached two functions. But these two seem already to have closed the list, in their kind; for every sentence must either convey or inquire.

There remains the class, *exclamatory*. This has been thought of as an alternative for the others, though, as the English *Report* says, "not standing on the same level of importance." On the contrary, it is of an entirely different *nature*. We have to do here, not with a mood-idea, nor with telling or asking, but with the *degree of excitation of the speaker's feeling*. Worcester's *Dictionary* admirably defines "exclamation" as "a sentence of passionate import, or passionately uttered." In English, there is one form of it (referred to in the first part of the definition) which has a special mark in the order, as well as in the punctuation. But (as the

second part of the definition implies) any sentence may be exclamatory if spoken with heightened feeling, and we accordingly often find statements of fact, commands, wishes, and even questions, with exclamation points following them. Thus, "It is better to sink than to yield!" (Longfellow); "Rouse up, Sirs!" (Browning); "Untouched with any shade of years, May those kind eyes forever dwell!" (Tennyson); "How could you ever do a thing like that!" (a *rhetorical* question, from a conversation).

The source of the existing confusion about exclamations lies in the fact that we have not used a name for the *opposite* of exclamatory. Let us, for lack of something better, use *non-exclamatory*, and define it as meaning *tranquil*, i.e., *spoken with indifferent, or moderate, or controlled feeling*. Then we shall easily recognize that any given sentence, whatever its mood may be, and whether it tells or (in form at least) asks, must inevitably either not-exclaim or exclaim. And we are ready now to see that there are necessarily *three* elements (one from each of the three groups pointed out) of entirely different nature from one another, *coexisting* in every sentence, as color, form, and weight coexist in every object. Every sentence (1) tells *or* asks (2) one *or* another mood-idea (3) with non-exclamatory *or* exclamatory feeling. So little mysterious is the solution of this problem, in which a wrong tradition has steadily ruled since three and a half centuries before Christ!

Besides its value in analysis, the solution will help the student on the practical side, in dealing with punctuation. It was *not* practical to leave him without a means of explaining what he repeatedly encounters, the exclamation point after a declarative indicative sentence, an imperative sentence, etc., etc.

The recognition of the constant antithesis of the functions *declarative* and *interrogative* is also of great help in teaching. For any kind of a mood-idea except one[1], we have a *pair* of ways in which it may be put. Thus we may have a declaration of will, or a question of will ("let us go," *eamus*, "shall we go?" *eamus?*); a declaration of fact, or a question of fact; a declaration of possibility, or a question of possibility; a declaration of certainty in

---

[1] This one idea is that of wish. A wish can be put interrogatively only through a periphrasis, as in "do you wish that he may survive you?"

an imagined case, or a question of certainty in an imagined case, etc. The facts are as familiar as getting up and going to bed, and much more frequent. And the statement should be in every grammar.

As for the general classification of clauses, no one but myself, so far as I know, has attempted, or even suggested, a division upon a basis corresponding to that of the classification of sentences. Yet it is most unlikely that the general forms of presenting thought would be changed by the act of subordinating one sentence grammatically to another. We may then reasonably hope to find the leading functions of independent sentences preserved in clauses. And this we do. A clause may *convey* (thus an idea of fact, an idea of purpose, etc.),[1] or it may *inquire* (thus in the indirect question, of many different kinds). But there is also one other function. There are clauses which neither *tell* a mood-idea nor *inquire* about a mood-idea, but *assume* one. Thus in "if I killed him, I killed him with good reason; but I didn't kill him" (Quintilian, 4, 5, 13), the clause "if I killed him" neither tells that I killed him nor asks whether I killed him, but *assumes* the killing, in order to tie something else with it (the conclusion) as inseparable from it. The case would be the same, again, in "if I should kill him, I should kill him with good reason." Our third function of clauses is thus to assume. There are no others. When then we come, in advanced teaching, to the classification of clauses, it will be into—

1. Declarative (corresponding noun, Declaration).
2. Interrogative (corresponding noun, Question).
3. Assumptive (corresponding noun, Assumption).

The condition (*if*-clause) is only one form of assumption. The other is expressed by the help of a general relative of any kind. Thus if I say "the man who wrongs another hurts himself," the clause "the man who wrongs another" does not state that any particular person does this, but merely *assumes* a case. The meaning is the same as in "*if* any man wrongs another."

Clauses are occasionally exclamatory, mostly when they are

---

[1] In dependent clauses, of course, that which is made known ("declared") may be the purpose, the reason, etc., of a third party or parties. The same may be the case with the question. But this does not invalidate our terms.

echoes of a more ordinary use. An example of the detached type is "If only I had known ten years ago!" An example of a type arising in echoing what another has said, is seen in the second part of "Tell me what he did." "What he did! What *didn't* he do!" So, also, single words or phrases may be exclamatory, and receive the point, even in the midst of a sentence.

Finally, it may be pointed out that independent sentences are often, though declarative or interrogative in form, really assumptive in effect. Thus in "somebody says 'no,' so do I; somebody says 'yes,' so do I." It seems to me, then, to be a convenient summing-up of the sum total of functions of sentences and clauses to say, in advanced teaching, that:

Sentences and clauses may be:
   1. Declarative (telling).
   2. Interrogative (asking).
   3. Assumptive (supposing).

One formula in particular is often of especial value. Since the indicative is the mood of fact, and since to declare a fact is to make a *statement*, one may say that the indicative is used in *statements* of fact, *inquiries* after facts, and *assumptions* of fact; or, more briefly, that it is used to *state* a fact, *inquire* after a fact, or *assume* a fact.[1]

The whole matter of the classification of clauses in English is one of theoretical consequence only, since the question of the mood is not affected by the choice of the declarative, interrogative, or assumptive form of presentation. In a brief later paper, I hope to show the important practical bearing of the classification upon precisely this question of mood, in Romance, Latin, and Greek.

[1] This formula, which I have found helpful in my teaching in Chicago and at Cornell University (it simplifies the uses of an important mood by reducing them to a few general functions), has found favor, and has already passed into three of our Latin grammars; though in all of these it accompanies the traditional classification of sentences, instead of having suggested a reform in that classification.

I may add that the substance of the exposition now completed was given in a paper (printed afterward for local use) before the Sixteenth Conference of Academies and High Schools held at the University of Chicago in November, 1902, and the results are also incorporated in the Hale-Buck *Latin Grammar*, 1903, and will appear in abstract in the *Proceedings of the American Philological Association* for the current year. But I taught the same doctrine many years before coming to Chicago.